SIR FRANCIS DRAKE, when a lad of eighteen, sailed on the West Indian Seas with his uncle. They nearly lost their lives through the treachery of the Spaniards, and for the rest of his days Sir Francis seems to have devoted his energies to getting even with that hated nation. A few years later, when he had obtained a vessel of his own, he landed with a troop of young men at Nombre de Dios. He captured the batteries, and before the Spaniards knew what he was doing, he had secured a position where he could charge on the city. Instead of resisting, the Spaniards fled. When Drake's men found the treasure house so easily at their mercy, they scarcely knew how to proceed, and just as all the wealth was within their grasp they lost their heads.
A drenching tropical shower came up suddenly and with such fury that they thought they were all going to be drowned. Drake, who had received a slight wound in the skirmish, fainted, and his men fled in confusion, dragging him with them back to their ships and carrying away only a small part of the booty within their reach.

When Drake revived he was naturally very much chagrined at the outcome, but he went to work on a plan to waylay on the Royal Road one of the mule trains due to cross the Isthmus with the court treasure at about this time. He first made friends with the Maroon Indians, who served as his guides. Under their direction, Drake’s men made the trip safely to Cruces, about halfway across the Isthmus. A little beyond this point they lay in wait for the treasure train. Soon mule bells were heard tinkling on the Royal Road. All made ready, and the surprise would have been complete had not one of Drake’s men misunderstood one
of the signals given and allowed himself to be seen by one of the Spanish horsemen.

At this the Spaniards became suspicious and advised a ruse. Usually the treasure of the caravan was carried by the first fourteen mules, which went well in advance. In this case these were sent to the rear, and mules loaded with grain and baggage were driven on ahead. When Drake’s men fell upon the baggage train the mules in the rear were made
to retreat, and were hurried back to Panama at full speed, thus saving the treasure.

When Drake realized that he had been outwitted he let it be understood that he had left the Isthmus; but instead of doing this he joined a French pirate. Then, with a small body of men they hurried back toward Nombre de Dios. Here, within hailing distance of the town, they seized another mule train and secured one hundred thousand

![Image: All that is left of old Spanish cannon as they fell from their rotting carriages at Porto Bello](image)

C. M. Peacock, photographer
dollars in gold and silver. The story goes that a large part of this booty had to be hastily buried before the Spaniards recovered and came back to retake their treasure. Later, Drake raided Nombre de Dios again, and burned the city.

Drake’s raids were second only to those of Henry Morgan, another Englishman, who, a few years later, attacked Porto Bello. He blew up the fort, with all the soldiers inside. He made the nuns and friars prisoners, and forced them to place against the walls of the castle the scaling ladders, by means of which he captured it. For fifteen days he tortured the colonists, but at last accepted a ransom of twenty-five thousand dollars and returned to the West Indies,
where he spent the money in riotous living. When this money was gone, Morgan took San Lorenzo near the mouth of the Chagres River and crossed the Isthmus to take the city of Panama. Without the leadership of the Indians who assisted Drake, Morgan and his men suffered greatly on the march across the Isthmus. Lost in the jungles and the swamps, much of the time without food, they were bitten by poisonous spiders and snakes, trapped in the quicksands, and made ill with fever. They reached Panama in a weak and wretched condition. On the savannas before the city were the cattle of the Panamanians. Morgan's men killed these and gorged themselves on the meat before it was half roasted.

When at last they succeeded in entering the city they found that ships had been loaded with the treasure and valuables of the natives and that these ships had disappeared. Some writers say that they had been sunk in the harbor. At any rate, the
treasure was safe from the buccaneers. Morgan took his revenge by torturing the citizens, killing many of them. Then he burned the old city of Panama to the ground.

The new city of that name, which is now nearly two hundred and fifty years old, was built several miles from the old city at a point where it could be strongly fortified.

For many years the Spaniards invaded Mexico, Central America, and South America,
not for purposes of agriculture—though there is no place where the earth gives back so much for so little labor—but to establish towns where they could sell their merchandise. For a century or more, the wealth obtained from Peru and the Pacific islands was carried across the Isthmus to the coffers of Spain, until the mines were at last exhausted. Then the richest highway the world has ever known, the Royal Road, was
allowed to grow up to jungle vines and flowers. 
To-day the Royal Road may be seen in spots 

![Ruins near the old city of Panama](image)

near the Canal Zone, though its course, like 
the route Balboa is said to have taken, lies 
in some places many miles from the Zone.
GEOGRAPHY OF THE Isthmus

Panamanian Products and People

As we have said, the Isthmus of Panama is a narrow strip of land connecting North America and South America. Unless we study the map, however, we are sure to think of it as extending north and south, when in reality it extends nearly east and west. It sounds very strange to people living in the United States to speak of the sun rising in the Pacific Ocean and setting in the Atlantic, but this is actually the case at one place on the shores of Panama Bay; for the Gulf of Panama is an arm of the Pacific and lies directly east of a portion of the Caribbean Sea, which is a part of the Atlantic Ocean. When Balboa crossed the Isthmus he went in a southerly direction, and that is why he called the ocean he discovered the South Sea.

All this is to help us remember that the
Canal takes a southeasterly direction from Colon on the Atlantic coast to Panama on the Pacific. If we want to fix the city of Panama in our minds we can think of it as being due south of Buffalo, New York, or Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Perhaps you will be surprised to know that the Canal is not built across the narrowest part of the Isthmus, which is at the Gulf of San Blas, sixty miles east of Colon. At that point it is only thirty miles wide. Why did we choose a route twenty miles longer?

In the first place, by the San Blas route there is no large river to help furnish the waterway, so the amount of digging would have been much greater, because the "backbone of the continent" is more than twice as high at this narrow part. Besides this, there has never been a road of any kind made through the jungle at San Blas, while at Colon there was a beaten path, some of it four hundred years old. The railroad which had been built at Colon was also a deciding factor.
The Republic of Panama is a trifle smaller than the state of Indiana. It is composed of seven states, the most important of which are Bocas del Toro, Chiriqui, Colon, and Panama. Panama comprises one third of the whole republic, and across this state stretches the Canal Zone.

The Canal Zone is a strip of land extending five miles on each side of the middle line of
the "big ditch." It is, therefore, ten miles wide and reaches from deep water in one ocean to deep water in the other, or a distance of about fifty miles. Over this Zone the United States government has absolute control, except for the two Panamanian cities
of Colon on the Atlantic coast and Panama on the Pacific. However, the United States has the right in these cities to dictate all measures relating to sanitation and health.

The state of Panama is only nine degrees, or some six hundred miles, from the equator, so it has a tropical climate. Though the
thermometer at times registers high, it seldom averages above eighty-six degrees. Darkness falls suddenly, without twilight, in Panama, and the nights are always comfortable.

It is sometimes said in joke that there are two seasons on the Isthmus, a rainy and a wet, but this is somewhat exaggerated. However, the rainfall on the Atlantic coast is about twelve feet yearly. On the Pacific it is about half as much.
January, February, March, and sometimes April are the only dry months. About the first of April or May light showers fall daily, or very often, and from June to December come regular "gushers." The sun shines brightly between showers, but work is suspended during the downpours. Sometimes several inches of rain fall within a few hours, which makes raging torrents of the streams and keeps the vegetation always green and luxuriant. It also keeps the ground in a swampy condition. In some places the swamps are hundreds of feet deep.

Grass grows so easily here that fresh-turned earth is green again in a few days.
Seventy-five varieties of orchids grow wild, with a great variety of coleus, and other tropical plants. One season’s growth buries everything, even houses, if undisturbed. A French village large enough to shelter a thousand people was dug out of the jungle after only a few years of desertion.

Many fruits—bananas, coconuts, alligator pears, mangoes—grow wild. The big-animal life of Africa is not found in Central America, but insect life is here in great variety. Tapirs,
ant-eaters, the iguana or lizard, and other queer animals abound, while deer and tiger cats live on the mountain sides, and the streams have many alligators. Paroquets, humming birds, and the beautiful white heron are common, as are all sorts of tropical birds of brilliant plumage. The bites of the poisonous spiders, the scorpion, and tarantula are fatal to their victims unless promptly treated with an antidote. The coral snake, too, is very common. After the Americans
came, the Canal Zone was soon cleared of dangerous animal life, the chief of which was the mosquito.

The natives are usually of mixed nationalities—Indians, negroes, and Spaniards. The Spanish language is spoken, as a rule. Most of the Indians living on the Isthmus were enslaved by the Spaniards in the early days and thus lost their identity, but there is still one tribe, known as the San Blas Indians, who boast that no white man ever stayed all night in their territory. Their women are most carefully guarded and are seldom seen. The men come to the Zone to exchange coconuts for salt and other commodities.

The native Panamanian of the lower class
The Land of the Panamanians

takes life as easily as possible. Perhaps one bright day two young natives walk off together and with a few poles build a thatched hut in the jungle, and set up a home. Whatever they lack they borrow from their neighbors who have been housekeeping for a longer period. Their food consists chiefly of bananas and coconuts, which grow about them in the wild state. They do very little cooking and wear little clothing. As their family grows up, the children help gather the food that grows wild for them, without labor; and
since there is no effort made by one family to outshine its neighbors, there is little to do but sleep and eat. Soon this family helps start others to housekeeping, and so their lazy, simple life goes on. The natives of the tropics are not subject to the fevers and other maladies that assail foreigners.

Two thirds of the Isthmus is wooded. There is a great variety of undergrowth and many valuable hard woods, like mahogany and ebony. Perhaps a native will hollow out for his canoe a mahogany log that would be worth thousands of dollars for furniture in the United States. It is said that some of the railroad ties in the early days were made of these valuable hard woods and were dug up years afterward in perfect condition.
Native Indians in their long “dug-outs” or cayukas. These “boats” are hollowed out of a single log and are paddled or poled from the stern.
Cholo Indians in the interior of Panama pounding rice in a wooden mortar.